**Woodland Wings: Conserving the rare butterflies and moths of the East Midlands**

**Introduction**

The ancient woodlands of the Yardley Whittlewood Ridge in Northamptonshire are home to beautiful and increasingly rare butterflies and moths. We need to expand our successful conservation work here to protect more vulnerable species.

Thanks to a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and support from Beds & Northants branch of Butterfly Conservation, we have launched the Woodland Wings Project. The three year (Nov 2017 –Nov 2020) project will inspire people living near this ancient forest and parkland to care for and protect butterflies like the Wood White, Black Hairstreak and Dingy Skipper, and rare moths including the Heart Moth and False Mocha.

**Key target Species**

The Wood White (Leptidea sinapis) is one of our most threatened butterflies, having suffered major declines nationally both in distribution (89% between 1976-2014) and abundance (88% between 1976-2014). Concern about the plight of the Wood White led to the production of a dossier in 2010, giving a snapshot of the species’ status. Worryingly just 50 extant sites were identified, of which 13 may already have lost their colonies. The project area is a key landscape for the Wood White, holding 20% of the remaining UK sites, thus the restoration and conservation of these colonies will aid the national recovery of this species.

Black Hairstreak (Satyrium pruni) numbers are also in decline, with falls of 61% in distribution and 54% in abundance recorded between 1976–2014. It is one of the UK’s rarest butterflies, found only in the East Midlands woodland belt. Black Hairstreaks were once widespread at Yardley Chase and Salcey Forest (two of the project sites), but there are few recent records. The fragmented nature of these sites, combined with the butterfly’s reluctance to travel far, make it particularly vulnerable to loss. Currently there are thought to be less than 50 remaining sites across the entire country.

**Project Aim**

To highlight the threats facing butterflies and moths and offer people the chance to make a measurable and practical difference. Our three year project will inspire and enable local people to conserve their precious natural heritage, demonstrating that local action can achieve real impact. By conserving the rare butterflies and moths of the area, Woodland Wings will help ensure current and future generations continue to enjoy the beauty and wonder of these fascinating insects.

The declines recorded in woodland butterflies and moths reflect changes to traditional woodland management, in particular the loss of routine coppicing and the planting of non-native conifers. These species are all associated with open spaces within woodlands, which require regular maintenance. The project will restore open sunny woodland rides and undertake ditch and bank management to create a diversity of habitats which will not only enable the target butterflies and moths to thrive, but will also benefit a number of non-lepidopteran species, including: Slow-worm, Grass Snake, Common Lizard, Barbastelle Bat and Hazel Dormouse.

**Methods**

* To work alongside Beds & Northants Branch to co-ordinate and run a programme of conservation management work to maintain, enhance or create suitable Wood White and Black Hairstreak habitat.
* To engage with the local community by organising and overseeing a number of public events and training workshops
* Guided woodland walks, practical conservation days, public talks and free training courses will be held throughout the projects duration, so members of the public are being invited to get involved.

**Contact**

Details regarding specific events and activities are to follow. One of the first things we will be looking for help with If you would like more information or to find out how to get involved please contact:

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